

# School's Out!

3 Ways to Help Your Child Have a Healthy, Educational, and Fun Summer

By Sara Rowe

**A**re you tired of hearing your children say, "I'm bored!"? Trying to limit their time with TV and video games? Wondering how to make sure they are prepared for a new school year in the fall?

Now that summer vacation is under way, you may be left wondering how to keep your kids occupied without the structure of school, homework, sports, and other after-school activities. Here are three tips for whipping your family's summer into shape (and having fun while you do it!).

## Get active.

If your child seems to be spending too much time on the couch or in front of electronics, it's time to get outside and be active as a family.

- Set aside an area of your yard as a garden and allow your children to choose, plant, tend, and harvest the plants.
- Check out local state parks and nature centers that offer walking and biking trails, canoeing, horseback riding, or other activities.
- Hold a time treasure hunt in your backyard, suggests Marc Sickel, founder of Fitness for Health. Another of his suggestions: "Design your own obstacle course using household items such as sheets, empty boxes, chairs, and sticks that can create tunnels, hurdles, and mazes. Create teams—parents versus kids or sibling versus sibling."



## Go out and about.

Your local community probably offers a variety of learning and exploring opportunities. For resources, use your area newspaper or Web sites that have a calendar of events. Consider these possibilities:



- Most libraries offer weekly story times for younger children, a summer reading program to encourage children of all ages to set reading goals, and special presentations that may include music, crafts, or visitors from local museums—all for free!
- Natural history museums, art museums, zoos, and historical sites usually offer interactive areas for children, tours created especially with families in mind, or special events designed for young guests. Many also offer discounted admission on certain days to encourage summer visits.

Jaylene Garau, author of *The Motivated Child*, also suggests considering a behind-the-scenes tour. "Some of these places offer these tours free of charge! Who knows, it may inspire your child to pursue a career that they may have never thought of."

- Find an opportunity for your family to serve together at a local nonprofit, your church, or a nursing home. Teens will also benefit from volunteering on their own, especially with an organization that matches their interests or career goals, such as an animal shelter for an animal lover. And even small children can get involved in raising money for an organization or a cause by holding a lemonade stand or yard sale.

## Keep sharp.

Your children may rebel against the thought of doing "school work" during summer vacation, so keep it fun when reviewing their skills with them and preparing for another school year.

- Take your children with you on shopping trips and have them assist in staying within a budget,

calculating discounts, and determining which products are the better value. Riche Holmes Grant, owner of Innovative Study Techniques, also encourages families to plan a summer budget together: "[It will] help your child gain a better appreciation of household finances. You can make it simple or more complex, depending on your child's math level."

- Problem-solving skills can be built by encouraging children to invent a new game or to use their imagination to build something new out of common household items.
- Find books that relate to your children's interests. Your children's librarian will be able to make recommendations or offer lists of books or authors based on books or topics your child likes. Creating a book club for your child and their friends is a great way not only to motivate them to read, but also to encourage them to share their thoughts about what they are reading. For the meetings, have your child plan games and snacks that are based on the book the club is reading.
- Creative writing can be used as a way to help your children improve their writing (and handwriting) and to learn more about themselves. Lisa Annelouise Rentz, a creative writing instructor, recommends using prompts to get the creative juices flowing. For example, give them the beginning of a sentence and ask them to finish it. Once they've done that, have them keep writing and develop the idea into a short story they can read aloud. ¶

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Creating a book club for your child and their friends is a great way to motivate them to read.